

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR  
 REVIEWED IMMEDIATE RELEASE DATE 7/2/85  
 July 8, 1980  
 RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE ☐ R  
 TS AUTH. REASON(S) ☐  
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Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the United States, Sheikh Faisal Alhegelan, today made the following comments after a statement by a group of senators was released opposing the sale of additional equipment for the F-15 planes which his country is purchasing from the U.S.:

"I am astonished at the implications of the statement made public today opposing the sale of basic support equipment for the sixty F-15 interceptor planes which the United States has already agreed to sell to Saudi Arabia.

"Since that agreement in 1978, stability and defense requirements have become significantly more demanding in that part of the world - roughly the sector from the Horn of Africa to the Indian subcontinent - containing the approaches to the more immediate area critical to almost the entire international community and especially vital to the progress and prosperity of the industrial nations. That should be clear from the major intervening developments, the most recent of which is the invasion of Afghanistan, but is also self evident throughout the region.

"The United States has itself initiated a number of substantial steps as a consequence of the changed situation. Certainly Saudi Arabia rooted by geography, history and all its being to that sector of the globe, must strengthen its ability to defend itself to the fullest possible extent.

"It has long appeared to be American policy - and in any event, is prudent among nations - to encourage and facilitate friendly nations in their own defense and not try, as is implicit in the statement today, to make that more difficult. That is especially relevant since Saudi Arabia is prepared to pay its own way and is providing essential elements and resources for stability in the Middle East as well as support for the international economy, a substantial sector of the developing world, and the industrial nations, including specifically the United States. That is also of relevance in the light of the constructive and cooperative relations which America and the Kingdom have pursued for the last half century on a broad range of matters of vital concern to both countries.

"With responsibility for the most holy cities of Islam, its own people and society, and a fourth of the planet's proven petroleum reserves - a third of all the oil in the world internationally available - Saudi Arabia must and shall take all necessary steps and determine its own most basic policies to assure its defense.

"More specifically, the Kingdom must provide for its protection in all directions, on a 360 degree perimeter, just as must most other nations. To try, as does the statement today, to deny already available equipment for self protection in one narrow-spectrum direction, would limit Saudi Arabia's capability to defend itself in all directions.

"The unavoidable implications of such an attempt are revealing further confirmation of the dangerous and destabilizing risks caused for the region as a whole, America's longtime friends there, the international community and clearly the United States itself by allowing Israeli intransigence and continuing aggression to drag out and preclude a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arab countries and Arab people, including the Palestinian people, are entitled to safe and secure borders and to govern themselves and live their lives in dignity, as surely as any other people and society.

"It is long past time that the Israeli problem is placed in perspective with the profoundly more important defense, economic and other vital interests of the United States, its key friends, the international economy, world peace and certainly the overwhelming majority of people in the Middle East, the larger setting from the Horn of Africa to India, and the Islamic and developing worlds.

"Much more than just the equipment which the statement today opposes selling to the Kingdom is available from other sources - and without restriction or condition.

"Relations between nations must be based on mutuality. And certainly relations between longtime friends sharing the most vital interests, as do the United States and Saudi Arabia, must be built on mutual respect, trust and a cooperative concern for working out the pressing problems of our world and time on a just and responsible basis."

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